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A Mystic Singer of the Plains

A FINE, cool morning in September—the soft, southwest wind bended the prairie grass until the tips of the blades kissed the earth—paying homage to their mother.

The ranchers and cow boys had planned a coyote hunt and the above morning was accepted without comment; they wanted to hunt.

They were riding on a high, smooth plateau, which gradually verged to hills on the west. Scattered promiscuously in front of them were several cur dogs and three or four grey hounds to flush the common enemy from his hiding place. The wind, blowing out of the

southwest, carried to the hunters the sound of the chase. The keen yelp of a fice as he dislodged a jack rabbit from its nest —only to pursue it frantically for a few hundred yards—when his dog estimate of speed convinced him that he could ne'er o'ertake that flying grey streak.

Scraps of conversation could be heard with once in a while a loud laugh. Sounds carry to a great distance on the light, clear

atmosphere of the prairie. This wide semi-circle of riders, mounted on various colored bronchos, with red bandannas knotted about strong throats and flapping in the breeze along with the other trappings which belongs to the dress of the cow boy, made a picture with which any artist who loves the wild and free life would have been delighted.

They were within a couple of miles of the

highest hills in that part of the country, when above all the noise of squeaking saddles, and champing of bridle bits, yelping of dogs, laughing and talking, at intervals another sound could be heard, but not strong enough at first to attract the attention of all the hunters.

After advancing in this manner for a quarter of a mile or more, the sound became more distinct and a rider here and there

along the line would stop his broncho, listen intently for the fraction of a minute, glance anxiously about at his fellow hunters, to see if they had heard the unusual sound, then ride slowly forward.

As they approached the base of the hill, the restlessness of the men as well as of the horses was apparent, for the sound, which at first had only been sensed by a few, could now be heard by all.

As they ascended the

side of the hill they were met by the vanguard of returning curs and grey hounds with tails tucked between their legs. Fear had assailed them and they were rushing to their masters for protection.

A wild, weird tone which filled all surrounding space, and which came from the top of the hill, tightened for an instant every muscular hand on the reins of the bronchos who were snorting and plunging.

The next moment every

man gave spur to his horse and they reached the brow of the hill on the dead run. The top of the hill was flat and covered about a half-acre in extent. When the riders in their head-long dash reached the edge of this small plateau horses were jerked to their haunches and with wide, staring eyes man and beast beheld the form of a great man lying prone on his back near the center of the plateau.

Life seemed extinct in

the huge body. Horses and riders stood at gaze like so many statues, with no word of comment. Thus perplexed, they saw the man slowly rise to a sitting position, and heard from his big, bronzed throat the same wild tone that had thrown the hunters into disorder shortly before.

Confusion reigned, for some of the bronchos broke and ran madly down the hill, while others stood and trembled. The men, having

lived the primitive life like the bronchos, were somewhat similarly affected, but the tone—so wild, so free, exhilarated the hearts of the more primitive of the hunters. A quarter-blood Indian cow boy responded to the tone, which suggested to him unlimited spaces, the eternal hills and vast mountains, by yelling with all the power of his lungs and at the same time rapidly firing his six-shooter. Whether the yelling of the Indian cow

boy or the firing of the forty-four aroused the man to the fact of their presence, they knew not, but he arose to a standing position.

And such a man! Well proportioned, but a veritable giant. Standing there in semi-nakedness, head held high and looking not at the hunters, but into the misty distance, he was impressive, powerful and physically perfect. To those of the hunters who believed in muscular decisions, he

inspired instant admiration. To the one or two college bred men among the numbers he was to their sense of sight a great mythological Greek god with bulging muscles, but to their sense of sound a voice divine. Thus the different minds sized up this great apparition that had wandered, they knew not from where, out of the hills and mountains to the West.

The man had scarcley changed position, but

standing there with large eyes looking outward, commenced to sing, or rather vocalize. He uttered no words, but the meaning of the tones were plain as English. It was the music of the big, open places, of immense forests—it was a universal song of the wild—and the voice, singing high or low, loud or soft, each tone was full and round.

The volume of the voice seemed to fill the whole prairie and echoed to them from the hills,

until the song of the wild came to their ears from every quarter. The effect of the primitive sound on the quarter blood Indian cow boy was instantaneous, for he had thrown his hat on the ground, torn his shirt open, and his naked breast was heaving with savage emotion as he chanted in an undertone songs his forefathers had sung many moons before the white man came to their hunting grounds.

To others of the hunters

who were nomads at heart, the effect of the vocalizing told on their features and in their actions. Some had removed their hats and were staring at the singer as if viewing a panorama of their ancestors who had wandered free and bold over the earth in ages past, living and loving where they listed. One of the cow boys had pulled his gun—as they often do in times of excitement—and stood with blanched face, eyes rivet-

ed on the singer, revolver pointed at the horizon, as though he would shoot a hole in the dimness of the distance through which his agonized feelings might escape. To the college men such a spectacle was nothing short of terrible—it exceeded their comprehension. To the man refined, all things primitive are more or less unexplicable.

The great man tottered, righted himself and once more began to vocalize. This time the big, solemn

tones pictured the sorrows of humanity. In the variations of the vocalizing one could detect the scream of the bereft widow, the wailing of the orphan, and the guttural moan of the man who dies in agony. It was the song of eternal sorrow—the great medley which goes up from the earth, and reaching the high heavens, informs the Master how little we understand the Way.

Tears were on the bronzed cheeks of the

cow boys, for the man was singing of that which they all knew—the stern drama of life.

Pausing a moment, he raised his hands in supplication, and the song, or tone picture, was of the great love the Father has for His children. Out over the prairie drifted the beautiful voice of the singer carrying the assurance of the hereafter to the plainsmen. Hope brightened the countenance of the ranchers and cow boys for they real-

ized the message of the Master had been conveyed to them through the wonderful voice of the singer.

The giant staggered and fell to the ground; he was dying while the hunters had been listening. They went to assist him, but he was dead.

They quietly and gently buried him—the Master's materialization of life and the hope beyond—with the music of the ages in his breast.

Departing for their dif-

ferent ranches they were filled with awe and wonder over the message they had received from the voice that came to them out of the Golden West.

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